TRANSCRIPT—IDELLE SMITH HARRIS

Interviewee: Idelle Smith Harris

Interviewer: Zoe Rhine

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Transcriber: Alice Helms

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Zoe Rhine: If you'll just say your name.

Idelle Smith Harris: My name is Idelle Harris. In school I was known as Idelle Smith. My name now is Idelle Harris.

ZR: And your parents' names?

ISH: Mary Silvers and John Silvers.

ZR: Were you born in Asheville?

ISH: Yes, December 12, 1949.

ZR: What area of town did your family live in?

ISH: I lived in what was East End. My father ( ). He said it was East End.

ZR: Can you tell me what street?

ISH: 5 Mountain Street.

ZR: Is that house still standing?

ISH: No, it's been torn down. There's a house that's still standing that was directly across the street but that was on Hildebrand. That's the only bad part, to know that our house ( ).

ZR: Did your family experience being moved during Urban Renewal?

ISH: No. We had indoor toilets. I told Henry Robinson that one time and he said, 'You was the uptown people.' Because a lot of people didn't have indoor bathrooms and so when I told him that he said, 'What?' Yes. And don't you know we had Bible readings in other peoples' homes and so we would go, 'Okay, indoor bathrooms.' ( ) We couldn't do it, or at least I didn't visit. So I couldn't go back home and tell my mama that such-and-such a person had to go outside to use the toilet. So yeah, we had indoor bathrooms

ZR: Did your parents go to Stephens-Lee?

ISH: No. My mom went to Allen High. ( ). My dad, he was from somewhere in South Carolina, so I don't know what school he went to.

ZR: And you went to elementary school where?

ISH: Mountain Street. What is now Herring School used to be Mountain Street School. You know they named that after Mrs. Herring. So that's where I went to school.

ZR: Did you have her for a teacher? Mrs. Herring?

ISH: No. I didn't. But I knew who she was.

ZR: Are there any teachers from there that you can name or thought highly of?

ISH: No, I think they're all gone. I think Miss Forney was there, at Stephens-Lee. I know she was at South French Broad. And there was a man but I can't think of his name. It's ( ).

ZR: It's going back some.

ISH: So, I'm trying to remember who the teacher was ( ). I can't think of it now.

ZR: Was Miss Herring the principal when you were there?

ISH: I don't know if she was or not. She was in education so much that you know that's how they named the school down there. She was a nice lady. Really nice. I remember her as a teacher and I really didn't have any interaction with her but I knew who she was.

ZR: Then after Mountain Street where did you go?

ISH: Mountain Street—where did I go? Mountain Street—.

ZR: Did you go on to Stephens-Lee?

ISH: No, because you see Mountain Street was elementary. I'm going to say Hill Street. I might be wrong but I think it was Hill Street. Because like I said, David Miller, when they started integrating the schools, my mom wouldn't let me go to David Miller. So I went to Hill Street.

ZR: Why didn't she want you to go to David Miller?

ISH: She didn't want me to be the ( ) kid. So, that's why she didn't let me go. Well you know, eventually we all came together anyway. And I never had no problem with that. I never did. But I was never that type of people anyhow. If I can get along, I would, If I can't, oh well.

ZR: So you never when to an integrated school.

ISH: No.

ZR: Do you by any chance remember what year they integrated David Miller?

ISH: I graduated in sixty-six. So, I guess maybe in the early sixties.

ZR: Sixty-four maybe? You went to Stephens-Lee in sixty-four?

ISH: It had to be before I went to Stephens-Lee. From Stephens-Lee we went to South French Broad. I think South French Broad was integrated—.

ZR: No. Someone just told me that the principal Mr. McKinley was white and there were one or two white teachers. Do you remember how many?

ISH: No, because I think all the teachers I had were Black. I remember Mrs. Omesa Dunn, although I never had her as a teacher, her husband was the pastor at Nazareth Baptist Church, she was a teacher there. Miss Dennison, Miss Forney. You have me thinking.

ZR: What was it like going to South French Broad as opposed to the year at Stephens-Lee. Were there any differences?

ISH: No. To me it don't matter.

ZR: You just went where I was told.

ISH: I knew I had to do what I had to do because I had the kind of parents that if I didn't, I was in trouble. So, it was exciting to me. ( ). People had their pets and their favorites; I was never one of them.

ZR: What did you do after you graduated?

ISH: After I graduated high school? I started working at Square D Manufacturing and I worked there for five years. And I got fired. Then I worked at a place called National Linen. I worked there for maybe two years and I left there and I went to Mission Hospital and worked there twenty-seven years. They finally decided that I wasn't working hard enough and they let me go. Mission. I got early retirement. Somebody told me that I would ( ) God forbid if I have kids, you get your ( ). I started off ( ) and did that for nine years. I ( ) and did that for two years. Then I went into transcription which was still part of ( ) and I did that for maybe five years but in the meantime I had ( ) so I had to get out of that. I went back to ( ) but I found out that ( ) a meal assistant and see I was having to go in patient rooms and you never know what's wrong and so I finally got out of that and went back to X-ray in the front office for ten years and that's how it was until they said, 'Bye' to me. But my time at Mission was alright. It wasn't bad. I enjoyed it but you know, things start changing and people start changing.

ZR: Right now there's a big change.

ISH: Yeah. I wouldn't go back if I had to. But I'm satisfied ( ).

ZR: So you've been in Asheville all the time.

ISH: I'm guilty. Every time I think about moving, I go across the state but I come back. Because I have family in Knoxville and I've got family in South Carolina, so I know I won't go to Knoxville, but I always say that so far something hasn't just grabbed me and made me stay there. I'm satisfied here. Sometimes.

ZR: Sounds like you have a great group in the reunion that stays close.

ISH: Oh yeah. Well you know some of the people you see sometimes and some you never see. So having the reunions here everybody can ( ). And this is the best people. Fifty years. I was telling one person, and he was saying it was too much money to pay. I said, ( ) I don't know what we're going to look like. I really haven't give it a lot of thought because I didn't want to just get overexcited about it but I'm ( ).

ZR: Yeah, you're going to party.

ISH: Right. I'm thankful that I'm sitting here able to go, able to do, because ( ) over the years. I'm just glad to be here.

ZR: Thank you so much.

ISH: Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW.